

A LONDON FEVER STILL—THE CRYPT OF BOW CHURCH.



JOHN

E. S. G.

production of a small fissure allowing a gradual escape. As to the production of such gases there can be no doubt that they are always produced by the gradual decomposition of animal bodies, and a case must be far stronger than is ever used to resist their pressure. The simple fact of exclusion from the air could not prevent their formation."

We have also put the following question to a person who is extensively employed as an undertaker:—Do you think that the lead coffins at present in use are capable of containing the gases which are generated by decomposition?—He said: I do not think they can answer any such purpose, and it is a common practice among the trade to make certain holes, which are partly concealed by the

coffin-plate, for the purpose of preventing the coffin from bursting.

We can from our own knowledge speak of coffins in these London vaults bursting with a report like a pistol; and it is not unusual for the sexton to go round with a long iron spear and puncture such coffins as he thinks suspicious. There can be no doubt of the escape of these gases, and also of their poisonous character, and that to continue to manufacture them in the vault of a church is not only fearfully dangerous to the congregation, but the whole neighbourhood.

The accompanying sketches are taken from Shoe-lane, and show the wall of St. Andrew's churchyard. They illustrate the evils of churchyards within towns.

behold the mysteries of London's earliest vestiges and most august remains. The mourner, who follows the remains of a friend to that final abode of mortality may start at the jarring recoil of the heavy iron doors which separate the living from the dead, and as he descends the dark steps and enters the region of vaulted darkness beyond, he will shudder belike, as though he were at once close wrapped in a damp shroud, and his whole circulation will change under the influence of that lifeless and loaded atmosphere; but his sojourn there is brief and hurried, and he ascends to the sunshine and vital air with a thanksgiving for its blessing, and a renewed consciousness of the cheerfulness and elasticity of the external world.

But though he may have noted the creeping blackness of the floor of this house of death and corruption, whose contact struck a numbness into his limbs and very marrow, and the rings of grey mould that vegetate on that ghastly pavement may have suggested to his imagination an idea of the moribund revel in which ghosts and vampires might be supposed to indulge there, in emulation of healthier spirits in their fairy rings on their own green sward, when the moon shines and sparkles on the fresh dews of early night,—yet there are other details peculiar to such places now used as sepulchral vaults which we may not expect his observation would extend to, under such saddening and brief circumstances.

It is for the zealous and unflinching sanitary reformer to make himself familiar with these dreary and perilous cells. Here with his lantern and a little camphor to burn, as well for the sake of throwing a white and penetrating illumination over their obscure recesses as likewise to move and somewhat purify the stagnant and oppressive medium,—here, surrounded by piles of dusty coffins, the lower tiers of which are bulged by the pressure of the leaden accumulation above, so that portions of



- A Is wall of St. Andrew's burial-ground, Holborn, in Shoe-lane.
- B Holes in wall of burial-ground.
- C C C Air-holes in the vault or crypt.
- D Wall of burial-ground, nearly opposite Plumtree-court, Shoe-lane.
- E Burial-ground of St. Andrew's, Holborn, in which is situated the second City of London National School.

Inquiring of an intelligent man who resides opposite to the church-wall as to the state of his neighbours' health, it appeared, that in a court adjoining, fever was seldom absent, and that at the present time persons were ill. Mr. J. W. Archer, who has had a good opportunity of examining the London crypts, writes to us on this subject as follows:—"Deep and gloomy must be the path of him who would